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**UNITED STATES EXTRADITES FORMER COLOMBIAN COLONEL
RESPONSIBLE FOR SMUGGLING \$10 MILLION WORTH OF HEROIN
FROM BOGOTA TO THE UNITED STATES**

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and JOHN P. GILBRIDE, Special Agent in Charge of New York Division of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration ("DEA") announced today the extradition and arraignment of LEONEL MENDOZA AGUIRRE ("MENDOZA"), a former Colombian National Police Colonel, for his participation in an international narcotics-trafficking organization that smuggled close to \$10 million worth of heroin from El Dorado International Airport in Bogota, Colombia into the United States.

MENDOZA's organization obtained heroin in Colombia and then used human couriers to smuggle the heroin on board commercial airliners destined for the United States between March and October 2004, according to the Indictment and publicly filed

extradition papers. The organization's alleged smuggling methods included hiding the heroin in suitcases that the couriers carried through the El Dorado International Airport. MENDOZA allegedly used his personal contacts with corrupt airport employees to facilitate the couriers' safe passage from Colombia to the United States. According to the Indictment, Colombian law enforcement officers intercepted, through court-authorized wiretaps, more than 50 conversations during which MENDOZA coordinated these safe passages.

The Indictment charges that MENDOZA's organization smuggled close to \$10 million worth of heroin from Colombia into the United States, including to the streets of New York City. To date, U.S. and Colombian authorities have seized more than 30 kilograms of heroin from the criminal organization, with a street value of more than \$3 million.

In January, Colombian authorities arrested 18 additional members of the organization in Colombia for their participation in the charged heroin-smuggling conspiracy.

If convicted, MENDOZA faces a maximum sentence of life in prison and a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years in prison.

MENDOZA will be presented later today in front of Magistrate Judge RONALD ELLIS and arraigned on Friday, October 7, 2005, before United States District Judge ROBERT P. PATTERSON.

Mr. GARCIA praised the investigative efforts of the DEA and the Colombian National Police. He said the investigation is continuing.

Assistant United States Attorneys NEIL M. BAROFSKY and DAVID LEIBOWITZ are in charge of the prosecution. The charges contained in the Indictment are merely accusations, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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